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ABSTRACT

Providing clear and timely information will be a key to holding public support for the improvements the No Child Left Behind Act promises. To have an impact, this information needs to be presented on the public's terms. This report contains data on recent public opinion about education issues, gathered from several polls conducted by national organizations. Graphs show that improving schools is a top priority, and that the public generally agrees that change is needed. There is strong support for the reforms in the new federal law, especially for requiring teachers to be licensed in the subjects they teach. There is strong support for closing the achievement gap, but most attribute the gap to factors outside school walls. The public strongly supports standards and accountability, but support for testing has limits. Testing in moderation is supported, and using test scores in addition to teacher evaluations receives public support. The public generally believes that education should be protected from budget cuts, and support for education outweighs support for all other spending priorities combined. Teacher support for standards, testing, and accountability is waning, in comparison with 1999 findings. Teachers think parent involvement and lack of discipline are top problems facing schools. Students take learning seriously, but feel that too much emphasis is placed on test scores. (Contains 12 references.) (SLD)

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THE BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE

EDUCATION INITIATIVE

WHAT PARENTS, STUDENTS AND TEACHERS THINK ABOUT STANDARDS, TESTS, ACCOUNTABILITY ... AND MORE

Updated March 2003

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AN ASSOCIATION OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS COMMITTED TO IMPROVING PUBLIC POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the K–12 education system as we know it will be under the microscope with an unprecedented focus on accountability for improving student performance. As states begin to implement the new law, public understanding and support for these sweeping changes is essential.

Recent public opinion data show a public supportive of the new law's goals and hungry for more information about their schools. However, there is some growing concern about an overemphasis on testing and the availability of resources, particularly among teachers. If policymakers can show how testing and accountability will lead to targeted help for students who are otherwise overlooked, these concerns can be turned into support.

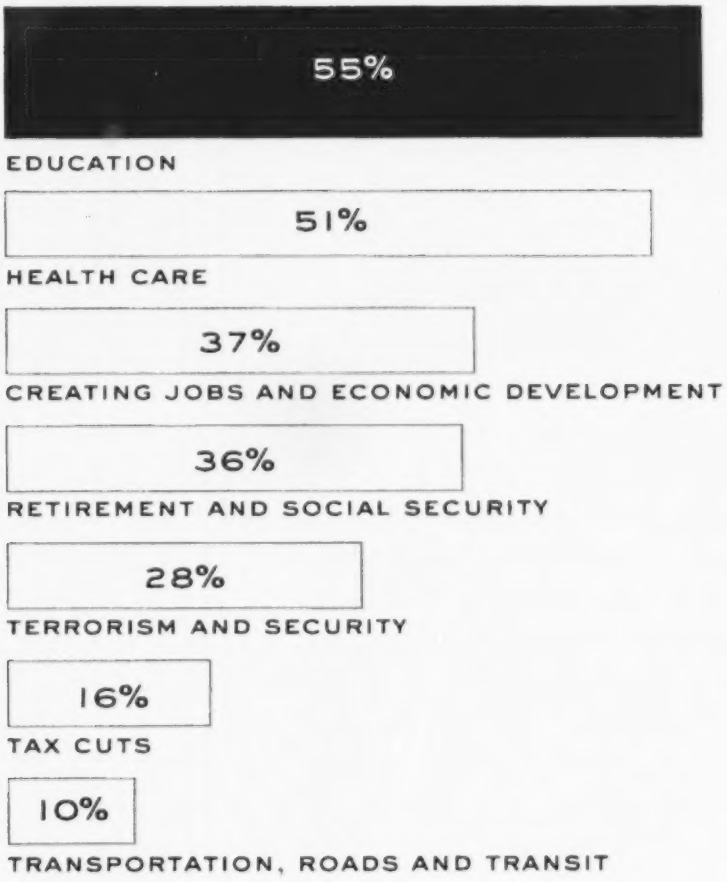
Providing clear and timely information will be a key to holding public support for the improvements the new law promises. Indeed, a centerpiece of NCLB is its pledge to provide an unprecedented amount of information to parents, taxpayers and other interested stakeholders. To have an impact, however, this information needs to be presented on the public's terms — clarifying how the law reinforces their priorities and addresses their concerns.

The following look at recent public opinion data offers a useful starting point. It provides insights into how parents and the public, teachers and students view reforms in their schools — and where support can be tapped and mobilized.

What the Public Thinks ...

Strong Support for Change

Improving Schools Is Top Priority



Source: *Demanding Quality Public Education in Tough Economic Times,* Public Education Network/*Education Week* poll, 2003

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CHANGE IS NEEDED

THE NATION'S EDUCATION SYSTEM NEEDS
MAJOR CHANGES OR A COMPLETE OVERHAUL

Source: Hart/Teeter ETS poll, May 2002

IMPROVEMENT IS POSSIBLE

PROVIDING ALL CHILDREN WITH A
QUALITY EDUCATION IS AN ATTAINABLE GOAL

Source: *Accountability for All,* Public Education Network/*Education Week* poll, 2002

Strong Support for No Child Left Behind and Accountability

Support for Reforms in the New Federal Law

REQUIRING TEACHERS TO BE LICENSED IN THE SUBJECTS THEY TEACH

OFFERING TUTORING FOR STUDENTS IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

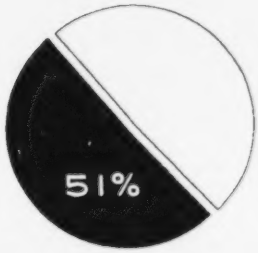
OFFERING "IN-DISTRICT" CHOICE FOR STUDENTS IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

MANDATED TESTING IN GRADES THREE THROUGH EIGHT

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S INCREASED INVOLVEMENT

Source: Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll, September 2002

FEW WANT TO RETREAT FROM CONTINUED EMPHASIS ON HIGHER STANDARDS



AGREE THAT REAL REFORM IS ABOUT RAISING STANDARDS, HOLDING SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABLE AND GIVING PARENTS MORE OPTIONS, COMBINED WITH TARGETED FUNDING INCREASES, AND NOT ABOUT SIMPLY INCREASING FUNDING

Source: Americans for Better Education, 2003

Staying the Course in Massachusetts

Even in the midst of a turbulent year for standards-based reform in Massachusetts, 57 percent of parents with children in school favor continued use of the state's standardized test as a high school graduation requirement.

And residents who are aware of the multiple opportunities to take the test and access extra help for struggling students support the state's standards-and-stakes strategy by more than 2 to 1.

For more, go to www.massinsight.com.

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STRONG SUPPORT FOR CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP ...

CLOSING THE GAP IN ACHIEVEMENT
BETWEEN DIFFERENT GROUPS OF STUDENTS
IS "VERY" OR "SOMEWHAT" IMPORTANT

Source: Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll, September 2002

BUT MOST ATTRIBUTE THE GAP TO FACTORS OUTSIDE SCHOOL WALLS

66% AGREE

OTHER FACTORS LIKE POVERTY AND
HOMELIFE ARE THE SOURCE OF THE GAP

29% AGREE

SCHOOLING IS THE SOURCE OF THE GAP

Source: Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll, September 2002

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Most Want a Balanced Approach

The Public Strongly Supports Standards and Accountability

FAVOR TESTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND HOLDING TEACHERS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS RESPONSIBLE FOR STUDENT LEARNING

FAVOR TESTING TEACHERS ON THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF SUBJECT AREAS AND TEACHING SKILLS

Source: Hart/Teeter ETS poll, May 2002

But Support for Testing Has Limits

PARENTS SAY "IT'S NOT FAIR TO PUT SO MUCH PRESSURE ON STUDENTS BASED ON THE RESULTS OF ONE TEST"

AGREE AN OVEREMPHASIS ON TESTING WILL LEAD TO "TEACHING TO THE TEST"

Source: Public Agenda, *Reality Check*, 2002

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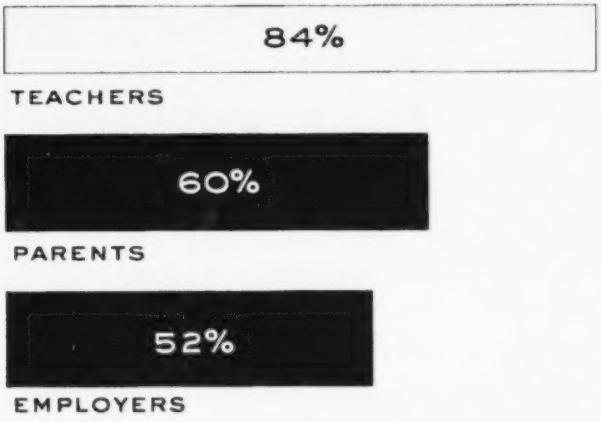
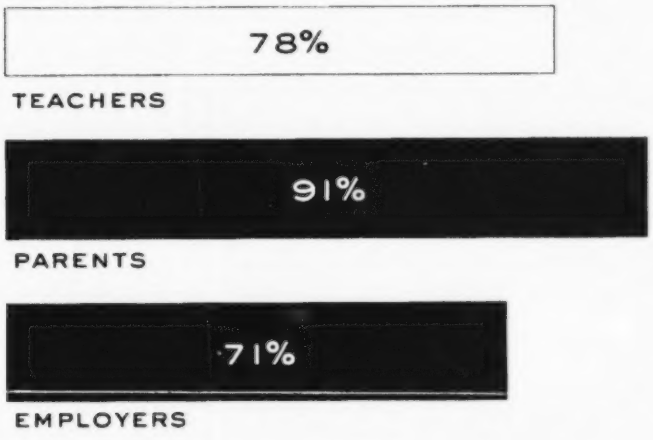
Support for Testing in "Moderation"



Source: Public Agenda, *Reality Check*, 2002

Using "Standardized Test Scores Plus Teacher Evaluations" To Decide if Students Are Ready To Progress



Source: Public Agenda, *Reality Check*, 2002

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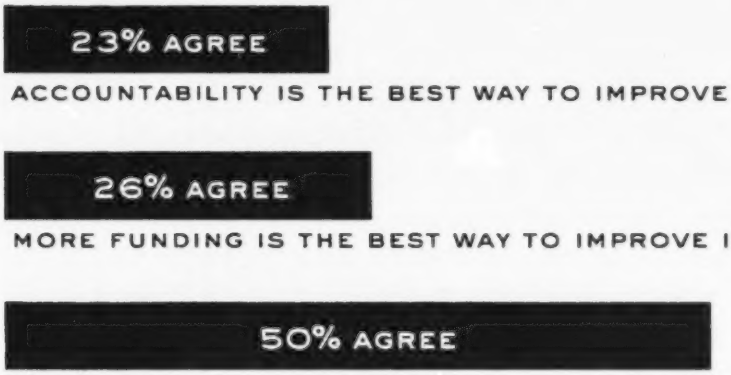
Increased Accountability with Support Is Key to Improvement


23% AGREE
ACCOUNTABILITY IS THE BEST WAY TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION
26% AGREE
MORE FUNDING IS THE BEST WAY TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION
50% AGREE
BOTH

Source: Hart/Teeter ETS poll, May 2002

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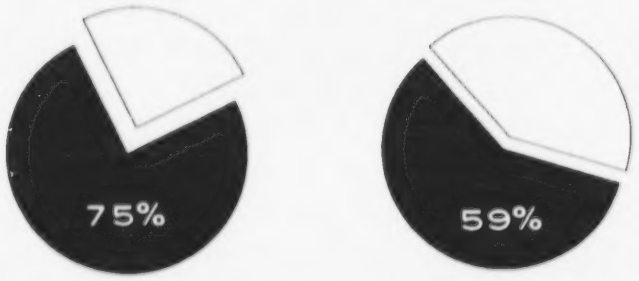
Most Want More than Tests and Accountability

Protect Education from Budget Cuts



BELIEVE THAT EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN THEIR STATE WILL BE SERIOUSLY OR SOMEWHAT AFFECTED BY BUDGET CUTS

WOULD INCREASE STATE TAXES TO IMPROVE EDUCATION

Source: *Demanding Quality Public Education in Tough Economic Times,* Public Education Network/*Education Week* poll, 2003

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IMPROVING RESULTS REQUIRES RESOURCES

Support for education funding outweighs support for all other spending priorities combined.

SPENDING PRIORITY RANKING:

Source: Hart/Teeter ETS poll, May 2002

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Overwhelming Support for Increasing Teacher Quality

93% support

testing teachers on knowledge of subject and teaching skills

91% support

offering more training programs so teachers can continue to learn and become better teachers

81% support

increased salaries for teachers even if it means paying higher taxes

73% support

testing student achievement and holding teachers and administrators responsible for learning

Source: Hart/Teeter ETS poll, May 2002

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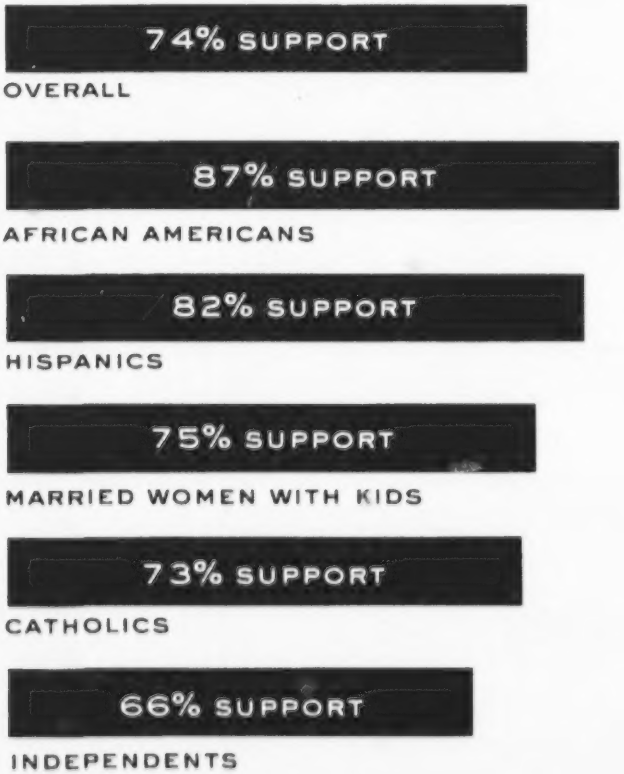
Strong African American and Hispanic Support for Targeted Help to Struggling Schools



Source: Americans for Better Education, 2003

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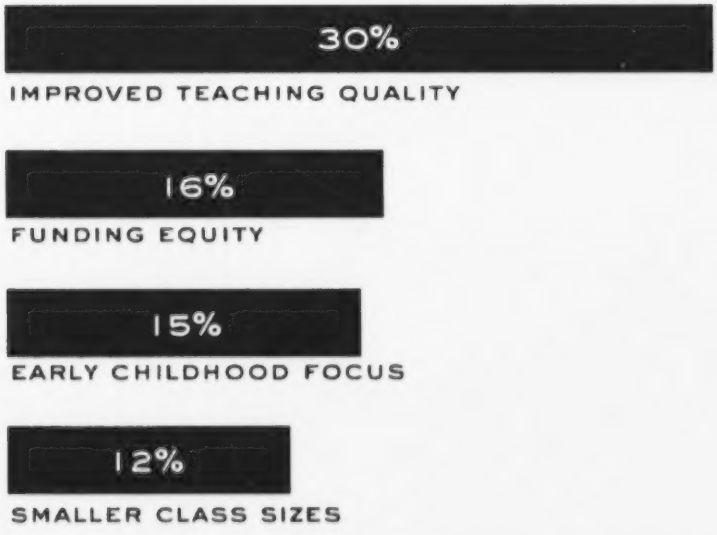
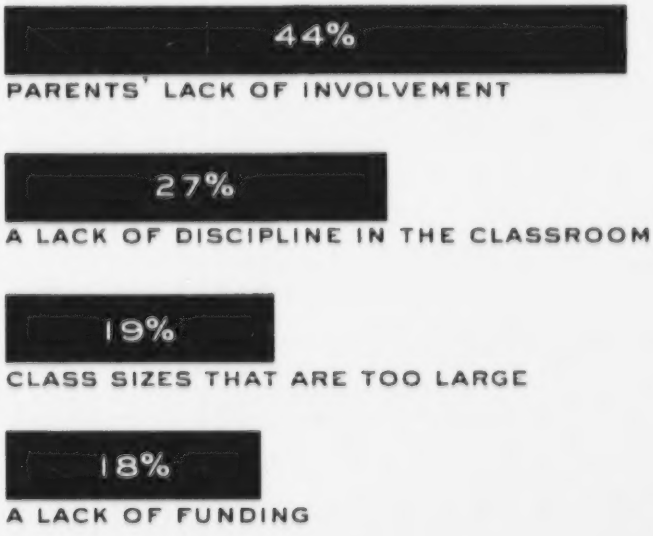
Priority List for School Improvement



Source: *Accountability for All,* Public Education Network/*Education Week* poll, 2002

Teaching Quality and Parent Involvement Are Top Problems



Source: Hart/Teeter ETS poll, May 2002

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The Public Wants More and Better Information about Schools

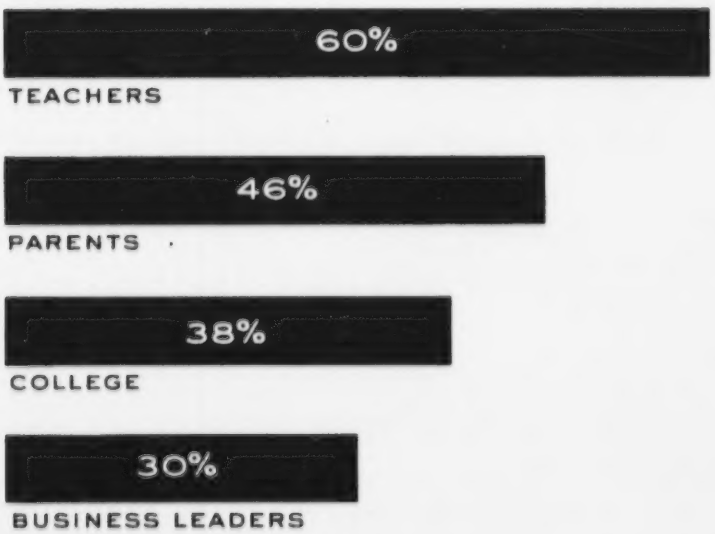
Americans feel they do not have enough information to make good choices about schools. Given their high regard for public schools, many people would rather not vote than make a mistake and choose the wrong candidate for public office based on insufficient or inconclusive data.

The public wants information about literacy rates, teacher qualifications, teacher quality and school safety. They also are interested in the availability of quality learning tools, school budgets and the ratings of local schools compared to others in the state or district.

Voters are less interested in standardized test scores and information about teacher salaries.

Source: *Accountability for All,* Public Education Network/*Education Week* poll, 2002

WHO IS THE MOST CREDIBLE INFORMATION SOURCE?



Source: The Business Roundtable, 2000

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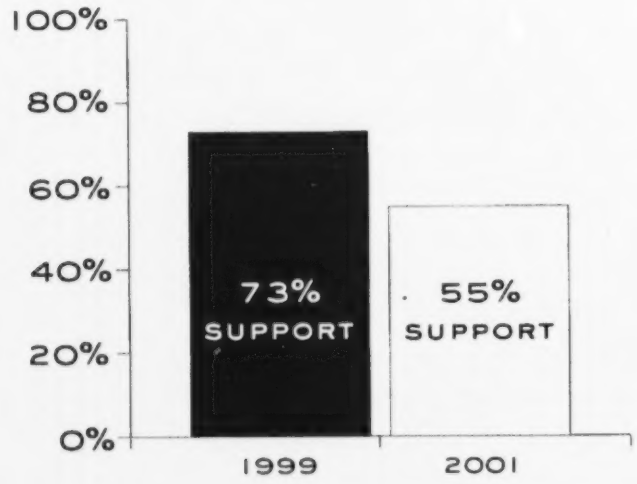
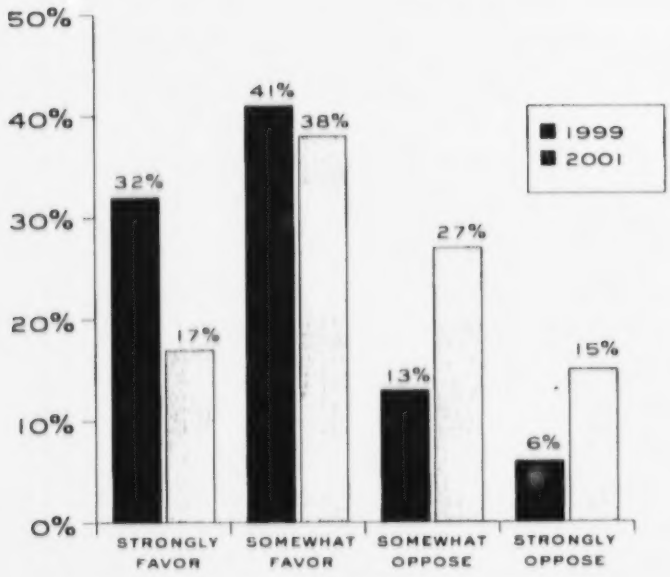
What Teachers Think ...

Support for Standards, Testing and Accountability Is Waning





Sources: Albert Shanker Institute, American Federation of Teachers

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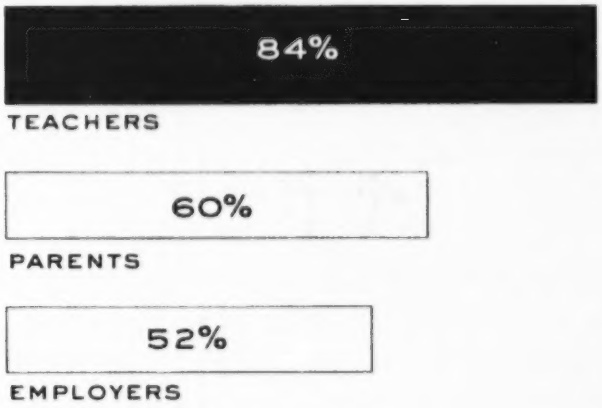
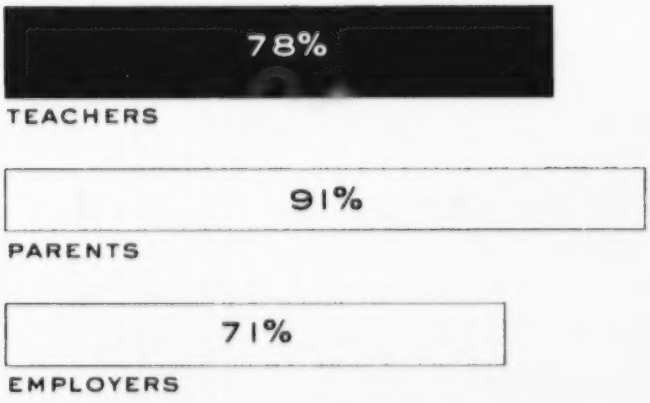
Support for Testing in "Moderation"



Source: Public Agenda, *Reality Check*, 2002

Using "Standardized Test Scores Plus Teacher Evaluations" To Decide if Students Are Ready To Progress



Source: Public Agenda, *Reality Check*, 2002

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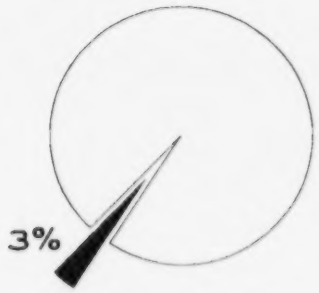
TESTS RARELY USED AS SOLE BASIS FOR PROMOTION



TEACHERS REPORT THAT STUDENTS IN THEIR SCHOOLS ARE PROMOTED BASED SOLELY ON STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES

Source: Public Agenda, *Reality Check*, 2002

WANT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TESTS CAN BENEFIT STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS

TEACHERS RECEIVED "SOME" OR "LITTLE" TRAINING ON HOW TO USE TEST RESULTS FOR DIAGNOSTIC PURPOSES

Source: Belden, Russonello, Stewart poll for *Education Week*, 2001

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A Better Balance in Testing and Teaching

30% Agree

STATEWIDE ACADEMIC STANDARDS HAVE LED TO "JUST THE RIGHT AMOUNT" OF TEACHING THAT PARALLELS THE CONTENT OF STATE TESTS

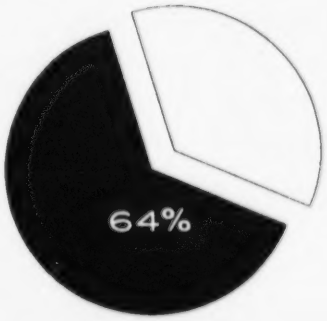
67% Agree

INSTRUCTION EMPHASIZES TESTS TOO MUCH

Source: *Quality Counts, Education Week*, 2001

Coursework Is More Challenging

CURRICULUM IS MORE DEMANDING THAN IT WAS THREE YEARS EARLIER



ATTRIBUTE THIS CHANGE TO STANDARDS

Source: Belden, Russonello, Stewart poll for *Education Week*, 2001

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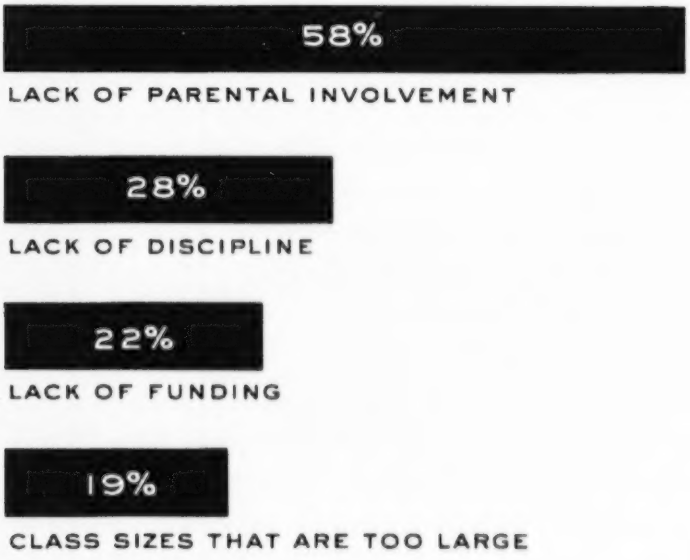
Parent Involvement and Lack of Discipline Are Top Problems Facing Schools



Source: Hart/Teeter ETS poll, May 2002

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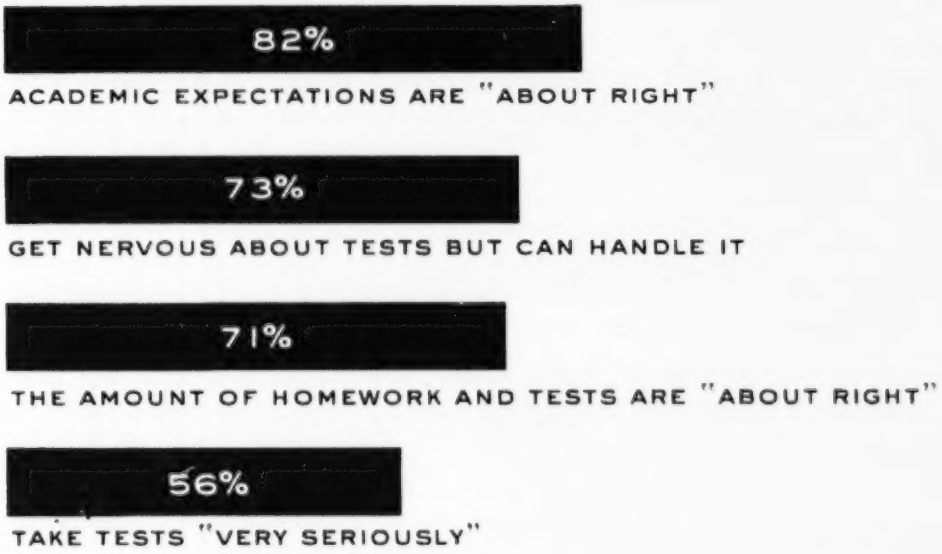
What Students Think ...

Students Take Learning Seriously



Source: Public Agenda, *Reality Check*, 2002

Too Much Emphasis Is Placed on Test Scores

IT WOULD BE WRONG TO USE THE RESULTS OF JUST ONE TEST AS A BASIS FOR PROMOTION OR GRADUATION

Source: Public Agenda, *Reality Check*, 2002

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COULD WORK HARDER IN SCHOOL

71% AGREE

"MOST STUDENTS DO THE BARE MINIMUM THEY NEED TO GET BY"

56% AGREE

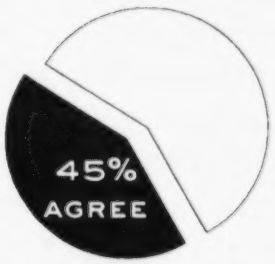
"I COULD TRY HARDER" IN SCHOOL

45% AGREE

"I'M ALREADY TRYING MY BEST TO DO WELL IN SCHOOL"

Source: Public Agenda, *Reality Check*, 2002

CONCERNED WITH LOW GRADUATION STANDARDS



"SOME KIDS GRADUATE FROM SCHOOL EVEN THOUGH THEY HAVEN'T LEARNED WHAT THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO"

Source: Public Agenda, *Reality Check*, 2002

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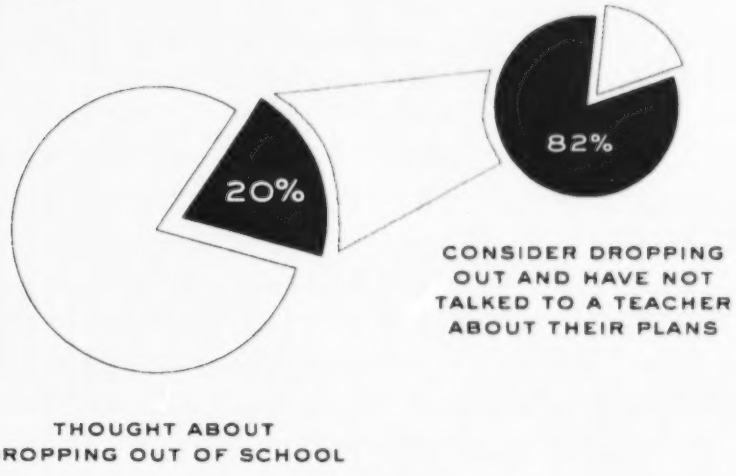
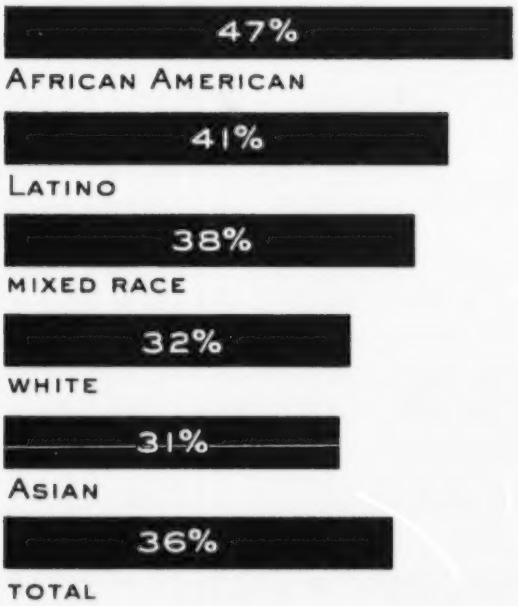
Consider Dropping Out of School and Don't Consult Their Teachers about Options



Source: *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher,* 2002

Teacher Encouragement Is an Important Motivator for All Students



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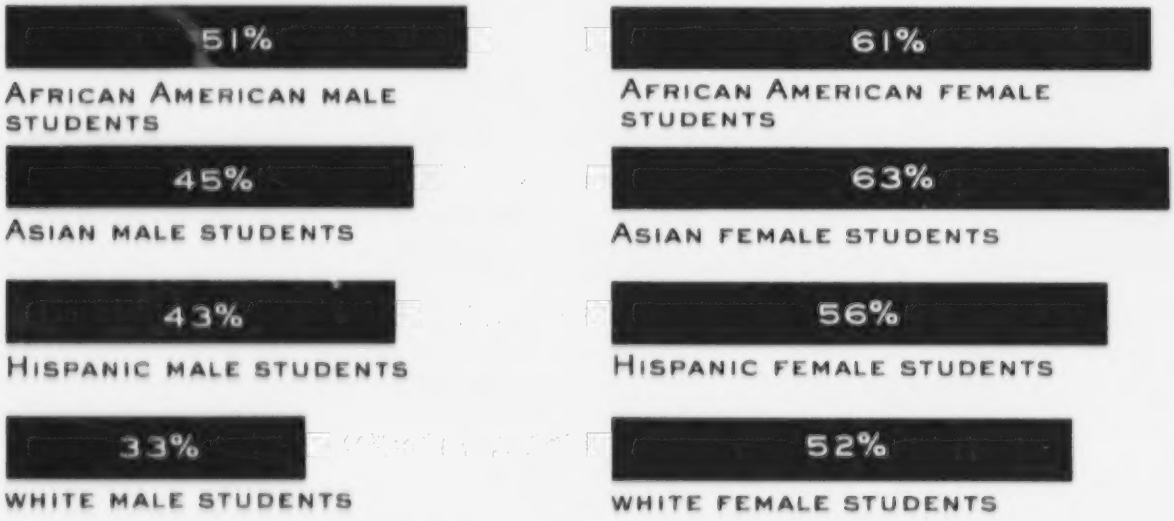
Source: Minority Student Achievement Network, 2002

Desire To Succeed in School Is Highest among Minority Students

Students report that friends think it is "very important" to study hard and get good grades.



Source: Minority Student Achievement Network, 2002

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RESOURCES ...

Accountability for All, Public Education Network/*Education Week* poll: www.publiceducation.org/nationalpolls.asp

Albert Shanker Institute, American Federation of Teachers: www.aft.org

Americans for Better Education: www.bettered.org

Belden, Russonello, Stewart poll for *Education Week:* www.edweek.org/sreports/qc01/pdfs/qcresearch.pdf

The Business Roundtable: www.brt.org

Demanding Quality Public Education in Tough Economic Times, Public Education Network/*Education Week* poll: www.publiceducation.org/pdf/2003PollReport.pdf

Hart/Teeter ETS poll: www.ets.org/aboutets/survey2002.html

The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: www.metlife.com

Minority Student Achievement Network: www.msanetwork.org

Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll: www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0209pol.htm

Public Agenda, *Reality Check:* www.publicagenda.org/specials/rc2001/reality.htm

Quality Counts, Education Week, 2001: www.edweek.org/sreports/qc01/

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